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SUBJECT: GOC CONTINUES ENERGETIC FIGHT AGAINST TRAFFICKING

Sensitive but unclassified, please handle accordingly

1. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: GOC officials and Croatian NGOs presented a coherent and well-structured approach to fighting trafficking in persons (TIP) to visiting G/TIP Foreign Affairs Officer Jennifer Donnelly in late September. Although NGOs praised the government's anti-trafficking laws, policies, and victim referral system, they admitted that Croatia is still on a learning curve, and effective implementation, particularly in the form of victim identification and effective court cases, is still being realized. Over the past two years, Croatia has put in place a National Action Plan, Operational Plan, legal framework and enforcement infrastructure, demonstrating a genuine political commitment and operational efforts in the areas of prevention, education and victims' assistance.

2 (SBU) Donnelly and embassy officials stressed in meetings with Croatian officials the need to further enhance anti-TIP activities by increasing the numbers of TIP-related prosecutions and convictions and intensifying the effort to identify more victims needing assistance. Although partly due to an overloaded and inefficient judicial system, the lack of TIP convictions remains of concern to the USG. Most NGOs, as well as anti-trafficking national coordinator Luka Maderic, noted Croatia's growing role as a destination country. With a good referral mechanism and shelters in place, the government appears to be institutionally prepared to handle this reality. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT

3. (U) Embassy Zagreb welcomed the September 27-29 visit of GTIP Foreign Affairs Officer Jennifer Donnelly as a valuable opportunity to reinforce strong U.S. interest in Croatia's anti-TIP activities, to commend Croatia for actions taken over the past two years, and to seek an intensified focus on identifying victims and building sound legal cases for prosecution and convictions of traffickers. Embassy arranged a broad cross-section of meetings for Ms. Donnelly with, inter alia, the National TIP Coordinator (who is also Head of the Government Office for Human Rights), representatives of the Ministry of Interior (including Immigration and Border police, the Organized Crime Department, and others), head of the local office of the International Organization for Migration, and a number of other NGOs from throughout the country.

4. (U) Throughout the visit, NGOs expressed satisfaction with the efforts of Croatian National TIP coordinator, Luka Maderic, Head of the Croatian Government Office for Human Rights. As noted in the annual U.S. report, the GOC's annual National Action Plan and Strategy for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons clearly identifies measures, activities, implementing authority, funding, and indicators needed to fight trafficking. While the implementation for the National Strategy mostly lies within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior, a collaborative effort with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Ministry of Family, Ministry of Justice, and the State's Attorney's Office clearly exists. Ongoing efforts to educate police officers and border agents about victim identification and assistance were particularly notable successes in the GoC's efforts to combating

TIP.

15. (U) Several NGOs noted that while the legislative framework and infrastructure to successfully combat trafficking in persons are clearly in place, a Memorandum of Understanding between NGOs and the GoC would help alleviate misunderstandings about which protocols the government was responsible for implementing, and under what guidelines NGOs should operate under when assisting TIP victims of TIP. GoC officials indicated that drafting, approval and signature of such an MOU is planned for 2007. This will further strengthen existing cooperation and will make protocols between NGOs and GoC more formal.

16. (U) During meetings with NGOs, Donnelly and embassy officials heard anecdotal information about Croatia's role as a destination country for both sexual exploitation and forced labor. Given Croatia's growing popularity as a tourist destination, particularly along Croatia's Adriatic coastline, sex tourism and prostitution are increasingly evident. NGOs noted that Croatia's special dancer or go-go visas (1,500 issued/available a year) were a possible tool for traffickers to exploit victims. In addition, IOM indicated that an estimated 200 unaccompanied minors visit Croatia annually, and alleged that 80% of these minors are trafficking victims.

17. (U) The GOC has identified seven TIP victims in the first nine months of 2006, (Embassy is seeking clarification from IOM which identified ten victims). During a meeting with anti-trafficking police and border officials, police acknowledged there is a 'hidden number' of trafficking in Croatia, as well as undiscovered cases in the country. One NGO asserted "we definitely have more victims than officially recorded." Some NGOs noted that part of the problem with victim identification lies in the fact that police in Croatia are solely responsible for victim identification, and while police have received good training, IOM questioned whether they are truly 'sensitized' to this inherently complex problem. Another NGO noted

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that the time window of 12-24 hours for law enforcement to interview potential victims is too short for victims to feel comfortable enough to disclose the details of their exploitation or realize they are trafficking victims. All NGOs clearly were happy with the referral system itself but noted that identification is a long learning process; Croatian authorities are still learning from other countries' practices.

18. (U) Some NGOs attributed low victim identification to an overall regional trend of growing sophistication and organization of trafficking (including more victims holding legal/forged documentation); as a result it has become more difficult to distinguish trafficking from illegal/legal migration and prostitution. While police reported that all illegal migrants are screened for trafficking indicators, two NGOs indicated that they did not believe screening among women in prostitution was "adequate", with IOM further noting that the adequacy of screening efforts are still mixed among women in prostitution. Due to the changing trends noted above, it has become more difficult to identify them as trafficking victims as many will insist they are voluntary. IOM also noted that trafficking networks are rotating victims between BiH and Croatia and that IOM is seeing women in Croatia who are later identified as victims in BiH and Serbia - although they usually are exploited and trafficked in Croatia as well.

19. (U) Embassy officers used Ms. Donnelly's visit to reiterate with GOC officials the importance of investigation, prosecution and conviction of traffickers as a deterrent to trafficking in the region and as an indicator of Croatia's seriousness in pursuing traffickers. One NGO asserted that the judiciary continues to be the weakest link and is not sufficiently pursuing cases. IOM also alleged that confidentiality is an issue among prosecutors and judges and described some instances where judges faxed case information (including victims' identity) to journalists. With seven ongoing investigations, and three criminal charges pending against nine alleged perpetrators, convictions are likely to increase as cases begin to work their way through the already backlogged legal system.

[¶10.](#) (U) Ms. Donnelly has cleared this message.

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